

Going Too Far

The drug thugs trigger a backlash in Colombia and Kennebunkport

BY GEORGE J. CHURCH

Try to imagine drug gangsters murdering both Attorney General Dick Thornburgh and his predecessor, Edwin Meese. Next, pretend that drug triggermen and guerrilla allies rub out almost half the Supreme Court—say, Justices William Brennan, Byron White, Antonin Scalia and Sandra Day O'Connor—along with hundreds of lower-ranking but still prominent jurists. Expand the list of victims to include Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee and Los Angeles police chief Daryl Gates, both slain, and Amy Carter, kidnaped and held briefly as a warning to authorities who might get tough with the narcobaron. And then the grand climax: the 1987 assassination of George Bush, murdered at a campaign rally just as he had become the favorite to be elected President the following year.

In the U.S. such carnage and terror striking at the vitals of effective government would be simply unbelievable. Yet an almost precisely equivalent list of crimes has been committed in Colombia over the past nine years. Since 1980, assassins have gunned down 178 judges; eleven of the 24 members of the Supreme Court died in a 1986 shoot-out between the army and leftist guerrillas thought to have been paid by the drug barons. Also hit were two successive Justice Ministers

(one survived), an Attorney General, the police chief of the nation's second largest city, Medellín, and the editor of the newspaper *El Espectador* in the capital city of Bogotá. The drug lords also kidnaped the 33-year-old son of a former President.

Then, two weeks ago, a drug hit team pumped five bullets into Luis Carlos Galán. A Senator and protégé of incumbent President Virgilio Barco Vargas, Galán was the clear front runner to win the presidency in next May's elections. But by killing him the *narcotraficantes* may have finally gone too far. Instead of further intimidating the government, the murder of Galán helped intensify a crack-down that by last week had escalated to what a drug lords' communiqué called "absolute and total war."

The raids, arrests and counterstrikes that followed presented the spectacle of a country fighting for its life against criminal combines financed by America's drug habit. The violence spurred the Adminis-

tration to jump-start its antidrug program, scheduled to be unveiled next week in George Bush's first major TV address to the nation. From his vacation home in Kennebunkport, Me., the President announced a \$65 million package of emergency military aid to Colombia, more than 2½ times the \$25 million the nation had been scheduled to receive. At the same time, the State Department warned that "Americans traveling to Colombia could expose themselves to extraordinary personal danger." Spokesman Richard Boucher said that State "strongly urges Americans to avoid visiting Medellín, headquarters of the drug traffickers' cartel."

Even before the U.S. announced its infusion of emergency assistance, Colombia's government had scored some early victories, confiscating in raids hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of drug kingpins' property. Included were 143 fixed-wing planes and helicopters believed to be

used to smuggle drugs to the U.S., a number of yachts, and the mansions and ranches of the most prominent lords of the Medellín cartel: Pablo Escobar Gaviria and José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha. Colombian television showed viewers some indications of the drug lords' obscenely lavish life-styles. One of Rodríguez Gacha's spreads north of Bogotá boasts several swimming pools, an artificial lake and a two-acre flower garden. Another Rodríguez Gacha mansion, inside Bogotá, features a crystal staircase set amid pink marble walls and bathrooms equipped with gold-plated fixtures and rolls of Italian toilet paper on which were printed copies of classic artworks. Escobar's prize possession, a 1,000-acre ranch known as El Napoles, even had a private zoo stocked with giraffes, dwarf elephants, rhinoceroses and some 2,000 other exotic animals, many imported illegally from Africa. President Barco decreed that the drug lords can get their property

back only if they claim it in person and prove it was acquired with profits from legitimate business, not drugs.

Most important, Barco proclaimed a state of siege that will allow him to extradite to the U.S. any of the 80 drug thugs indicted by American prosecutors without getting a judge's signature on the order. That end-runs one of the biggest barriers to punishment of the gangsters: an intimidated Colombian Supreme Court in 1987 declared a U.S.-Colombia extradition treaty invalid on the flimsiest of technicalities. Both Washington and Bogotá officials declare that the drug lords fear extradition more than anything else because they cannot terrorize judges and juries in the U.S. as readily as they can those in Colombia. The gangsters agree. Their communiqués have been issued in the name of a group that calls itself, with defiant sarcasm, the Extraditables. It has adopted the slogan "Better a Tomb in Colombia Than a Jail Cell in the U.S."

Though Colombian police initially rounded up and arrested 11,000 people—many of whom were quickly released—by Friday they had nabbed only six people on the U.S. Justice Department's 120-name "long list" of those wanted for questioning, and not one of the suspects on a most-wanted list of twelve supplied to the Bogotá government. The biggest catch: Eduardo Martínez Romero, believed to be a financial adviser to the Medellín cartel. He is one of several people indicted in the U.S. for involvement in an alleged \$1.2 billion money-laundering scheme, in which drug money was passed off as the supposed profits of jewelry and gold-trading businesses. Martínez is described as only a middle-size fish, but he could turn out to be highly important. If he is extradited and decides to talk in return for a light sentence, he might point out where his chiefs have hidden billions of dollars in profits and investments. The U.S. and friendly nations could then seize those assets.

At week's end U.S. authorities, long out of practice in extradition cases involving Colombia, were racing against a Monday deadline to complete a small mountain of paperwork needed for Martínez's extradition. If they could not meet that deadline, Martínez would have to be turned loose. Since he had not been charged with any crime in Colombia, he could be held only seven days after his arrest, even during a state of siege.

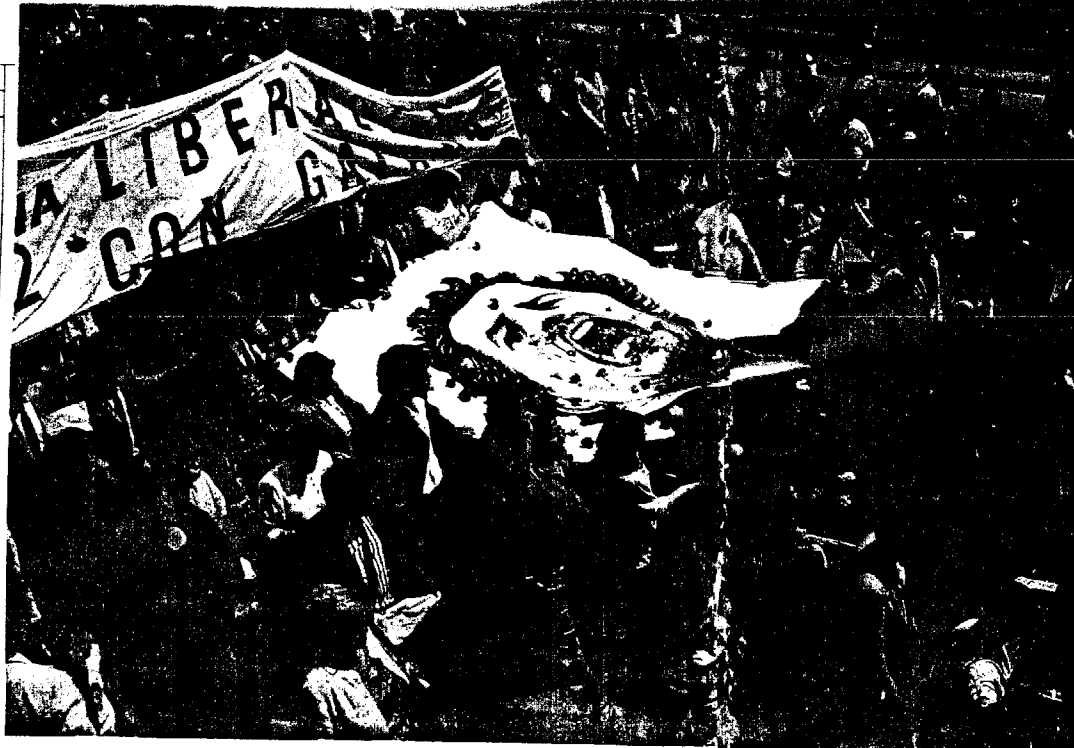
"We declare absolute and total war on the government... and all those who have prosecuted and attacked us."

—The cartel's communiqué



"We will not be cowed. We shall prevail over the forces that would destroy our democracy and enslave our nation."

—Colombia President Virgilio Barco Vargas



Drug violence strikes down the high and the low: presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán, mourned by thousands, left, and an unidentified corpse dumped by a Medellín roadside

The Dirty Dozen

Wanted in America: Colombia's biggest narcobarons



Pablo Escobar Gaviria, 39:

Leader of the Medellín cartel, which dominates the world cocaine trade. Escobar, who has a fortune estimated at more than \$2 billion, is under indictment in Miami, Los Angeles and Atlanta.



José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, 42:

The most vicious of the Medellín kingpins, dubbed "El Mexicano."



Gustavo de Jesús Gaviria Rivero, 42:

Escobar's cousin and right-hand man. Under indictment in Atlanta.



Jorge Luis Ochoa Vásquez, 40:

Chief executive officer of the family cocaine business, he is Pablo Escobar's peer in wealth, political influence and legal invincibility. Under indictment in Miami and Atlanta.



Juan David Ochoa Vásquez, 41:

Jorge's elder brother, he helps manage the business.



Fabio Ochoa Vásquez, 32:

The youngest Ochoa son, "Fabito" helps supervise the family business.



Miguel Ángel Rodríguez Orejuela, 46:

Brother of Gilberto. Co-owner of the soccer team and a chain of drugstores and big businesses in Medellín. Under indictment in New Orleans.

Jaime Raúl Oréjuela Caballero, 46:

Indicted in New York in 1985 for drug trafficking.

Gilberto José Rodríguez Orejuela, 45:

Head of the Cali cartel. Owned a soccer team in Medellín and the First Interamericas Bank in Panama. Under indictment in New York, Los Angeles, New Orleans and Miami.

Geraldo Moncada, 42:

Money launderer for the Escobar and Ochoa families. Under indictment in Atlanta.

José Santacruz Londoño, 45:

Partner of the Rodríguez Orejuelas. A prominent figure in the Cali cartel, whose gang dominates the New York drug market. Under indictment in New York.

José Ivan Duarte Acero, 37:

Indicted in Miami for the attempted murder of two DEA agents.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration was reportedly keeping a plane ready to fly him to America as soon as the last i was dotted on the extradition papers.

Yet Escobar, Rodríguez Gacha and the other drug lords had all escaped—perhaps into the Colombian jungles, maybe to Peru, Brazil or Panama, where strongman Manuel Antonio Noriega has helped them hide out during previous crackdowns. The Extraditables on Thursday issued a bulletin (printed on stationery with the cartel's makeshift trademark) declaring war to the death on any politicians, judges, journalists or members "of the political and industrial oligarchy" who oppose them, adding menacingly that they would not "respect the families" of their targets. To underscore those threats, the gangsters bombed the headquarters of the Conservative Party and of Galán's Liberal Party campaign or-

ganization, and burned the ranches of former Finance Minister Edgar Gutiérrez Castro and Senator Ignacio Velez Escobar.

Can the Colombian government win this war against the gangsters who smuggle into the U.S. an estimated 80% of all the cocaine snorted or smoked by Americans? The record is not encouraging. The drug barons have been forced to flee abroad before, notably during the crackdown that followed the 1984 assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, only to return and flaunt their wealth and power more ostentatiously than ever.

President Barco will have to sustain the campaign—at considerable risk to his own life—long after public outrage at the rubout of Galán has subsided. In an interview with TIME earlier this year, Barco asserted, "We're fighting a struggle that implies such high costs as no other nation has been will-

ing to pay." But, he said, "fighting against drugs means fighting for democracy."

Even if Barco persists, though, Washington is concerned that the Colombian government cannot match the drug gangs in money, firepower or training. The cartel runs a regular school for motorcycle-riding assassins (called *sicarios*) just outside Medellín. There, as shown on a videotape boldly distributed by the coke cartel, aspiring murderers are drilled in such techniques as twisting around on their choppers to blanket a car with lethal gunfire as they roar past. The trainers have been identified as British, South African and Israeli mercenaries; an embarrassed Israeli government pledged last week to investigate the reports and, if they are true, do all it can to stop such activity.

The U.S. aid package to Barco's mili-

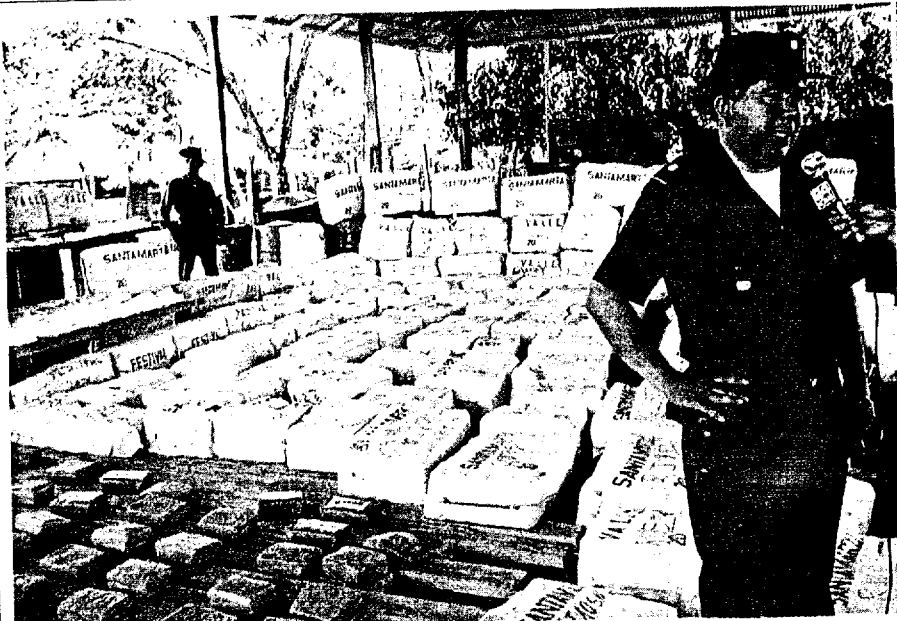
balance. In response to Colombian requests, by Thursday evening Bush's White House staff outlined to the President what could be scraped together. Bush insisted that the aid had to reach Colombia fast and be paid for without hurting other countries or Government programs. The assistance was shaped into a formal plan by Friday morning and announced by the White House that afternoon, following consultations with congressional leaders. It includes 20 Huey helicopters, machine guns, mortars, 18-man assault boats, jeeps, radio equipment and ambulances. The first installment, consisting of eight Hueys and various small arms and ammunition worth \$20 million in all, should be delivered in the next 14 days, the rest within a month or so.

There is some talk too of sharing more intelligence with the Bogotá government. In the past, the DEA pointed the Colombians to the sites of cocaine labs. But the CIA and the National Security Agency refused to make available satellite photographs and electronically intercepted messages—with some justification, considering how thoroughly the Colombian government was thought to be honeycombed by drug-gang spies.

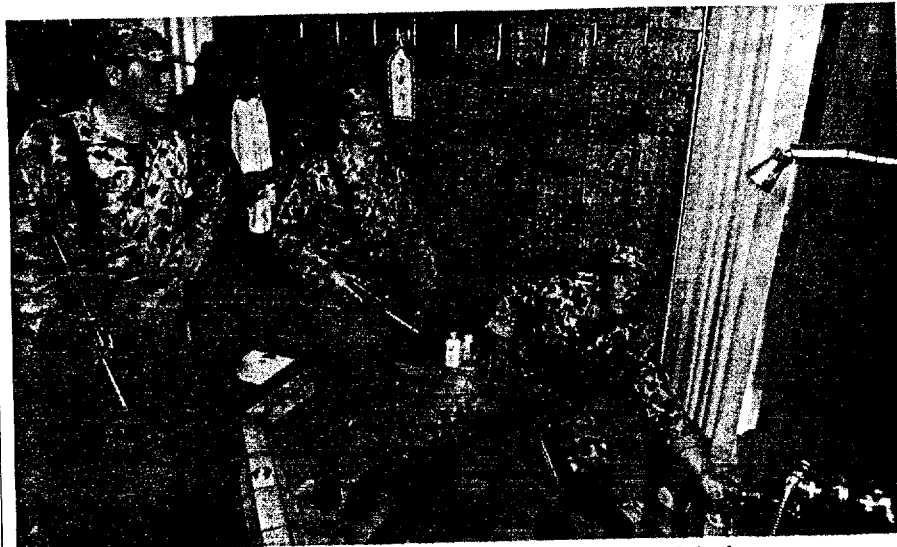
Despite some initial press speculation, however, Bush from the beginning firmly ruled out the use of U.S. troops, and made that stand public after telephoning Barco Monday night. Barco briefly raised the subject only to dismiss it; the Colombians, he said, do not want any such assistance. Both Presidents are well aware that the presence of armed Yankees would be bitterly resented as U.S. interference. The White House, however, rather nervously disclosed that a "small" band of Americans will be dispatched to train the Colombians in the use of the military equipment they will be getting. One official estimated the number of trainers and support personnel at 50 to 100.

U.S. troops may not be needed anyway: possibly the drug lords began the latest round of murders in desperation because the Colombian government was already putting a deep crimp in their activities. One of the hits was on Medellín police chief Valdemar Franklin Quintero, who had commanded an operation called Rainbow that resulted in the destruction of 28 cocaine-processing laboratories and the capture of eleven tons of the drug.

Even more important, Colombian authorities in the first six months of 1989 seized more than a million gallons of processing chemicals such as ether and acetone—enough to make 320 tons of cocaine, almost the entire estimated yearly output of the cartel. It was the rubouts of Franklin Quintero and Superior Court



Colombian police commander with a cache of cocaine seized in a government raid



Soldiers awed by the obscene lavishness of drug lord Rodríguez Gacha's bathroom

The murder box score: 178 judges, one Justice Minister, one editor . . .

Magistrate Carlos Valencia, who invalidated a jury's verdict acquitting Rodríguez Gacha of murder, that caused President Barco to declare that he was reviving the extradition process. The murder of presidential candidate Galán, occurring minutes before Barco went on television, then prompted the mass arrests and the escalation to full war.

Though the U.S. has a big stake in the battle in Colombia, it cannot do much besides send matériel and cheer for Barco. Washington's antidrug policy is moving away from interdiction of supply to cutting down demand at home. Bush's program will propose shifting funds to expanded drug-education and -treatment programs, and stiffer penalties for casual users. Such an emphasis on curtailing the U.S. appetite for cocaine and other drugs is fine by

the Colombians. As President Barco told TIME, "Every time a North American youngster pays for his vice in the streets of New York, Miami or Chicago, he becomes a link in the chain of crime, terror and violence which has caused us so much damage and pain. The best help the U.S. could give for the tranquillity and the defense of human rights of Colombians would be attacking face to face the consumption of drugs in that country."

After years of nagging Colombia to crack down on its cocaine gangsters, the U.S. is seeing the government literally risk its life to do so. Now the question is how hard America is prepared to fight the drug war in its own streets.

—Reported by Dan Goodgame/
Kennebunkport, John Moody/Bogotá and Elaine
Shannon/Washington

My Lunch with Felix

A correspondent's very public encounter with a suspected spy

BY BRUCE VAN VOORST

For Felix Bloch it was "just another day," but a meal with him last week at Washington's posh Jockey Club took place under the watchful gaze of FBI agents two tables away, while a posse of reporters and TV cameramen waited outside. Two months have passed since the State Department accused Bloch of contacts with a Soviet agent, setting off a circus of public surveillance but no formal charges. Yet as Bloch sipped a vodka tonic and spoke angrily of the "F— Bureau of Incompetents," he seemed little changed from the career foreign-service officer I have known for more than 28 years. "I guess the bottom line is they don't have a case yet," he said.

Bloch, 54, appears much more dynamic than the stiff-necked, melancholy personality portrayed on television. Always a meticulous dresser, he suggested that we meet "someplace where you need a coat and tie" in order to keep the casually attired mob outside.

"Do you really think I'm dour?" he began, referring to a description of him in a recent issue of *TIME*. It seemed an odd concern for a man at the center of the most serious State Department espionage scandal since the Alger Hiss affair. But perhaps Bloch's preoccupation with the media is understandable: he carried with him a color photo of a woman knocked to the ground in a supermarket by a burly TV cameraman who had been tracking Bloch's grocery cart. "That's the way it is nowadays," he said, sighing.

Some suggest that Bloch enjoys his notoriety. Yet he has rejected a barrage of telephone calls and messages from Diane Sawyer asking him to appear on *Prime Time Live* and from Mike Wallace for *60 Minutes*. Bloch plays along with the reporters who dog his every step. "Longevity runs in the family," he cautions. "This could go on for another 35 years."

With the skill of a veteran diplomat, he dodges questions about espionage. "There have been no charges," he said at lunch. What of the Government's statement that he had been involved in a "compromise of security"? "What's a 'compromise'?" he asked coyly. Anyway, he added, "there's no evidence of a compromise."

Does that mean he is innocent? Bloch paused an agonizing 30 seconds. "I can't comment on particulars, for then I must comment on the whole." He has heard that a federal grand jury is investigating. "What more can they learn?" Bloch asked. "They have all my papers and have talked to all my friends and colleagues."

Bloch's attitude toward the investiga-

tion is ambivalent. At his first FBI interrogation, on June 22, he not only surrendered his diplomatic passport, as he was required to do, but volunteered to give up his regular passport as well. He says he agreed to permit the FBI to search his car and apartment without a warrant and even reminded the agents to check the cellar storage space. But when Bloch and his wife Lou returned from a trip to New York City, they found a valuable chandelier cracked, the windows open and the air conditioning running. They submitted a bill to the FBI. To Bloch's great irritation, the FBI also confiscated his private

said. "I don't expect anything else." Can he endure the pressure? "I know people think of suicide," Bloch said, "but my roots are in Vienna, where everybody thinks of suicide all the time." Thinking and doing, he seemed to be saying, are two different things.

Acquaintances have searched in vain for an indication of what might have motivated Bloch's espionage, if indeed the Government's suspicions are justified. Money is an unlikely answer. He still earns \$80,000 a year from the State Department, and his wife has additional income. Except for their \$328,000 apartment, Bloch has modest tastes. He seems satisfied with his books, the theater, his stamp collection and a glass of good wine. Bloch resented serving under politically appointed ambassadors in Vienna, but his real complaint is with the State Depart-



Every breath you take, every move you make: Bloch in a quiet moment in Washington

"Longevity runs in the family; this could go on for another 35 years."

papers and only belatedly returned a checkbook, with just three blank checks, so he could pay some bills.

Angered by intense surveillance in New York City, Bloch took to marching up one-way streets, causing traffic tie-ups as the pursuing FBI autos bucked oncoming cars. At intersections the FBI held traffic, but Bloch chose to let cars back up while he waited for a green light.

In Washington, to ease the FBI's burden, Bloch generally tells agents where he is headed. Even so, as one agent allowed, there have been some fender benders caused by the troupe. In front and back of Bloch's Washington apartment, FBI agents sit in autos, the motors running, smiling wanly at passersby.

Still, Bloch does not play the deeply wronged innocent. A self-described fatalist, he is stoic. "Life is unfair, that's it," he

ment's failure to consider him for appointment as Ambassador to East Germany, and his later lack of success in becoming Deputy Ambassador to the Hague or Consul General in Munich, even though he had the backing of his immediate bosses.

Is he guilty? Bloch's Talmudic refusal to deny everything leaves the question open. After lunch we stopped in the men's room, where an FBI agent rushed in, standing, staring and listening as we washed our hands. Bloch agreed to meet again, "providing I don't defect to East Berlin before then."

"Just kidding," he added, smiling at the agent. Outside, Bloch headed toward Dupont Circle, trailing agents and media like the Pied Piper. "The guy's got guts," mused one agent as he rejoined the procession.